



A life long search ends

*For the first time
in 57 years, she
may be joining her
family for the
holidays*

Looking over photos of her natural parents and sisters, Hermie Jones of Kresge 705, Houston, Texas dedicated most of her life to locating the family she was separated from 57 years ago.

For 29 years, 57-year-old Hermie Jones of Kresge 705, Houston, Texas had tried desperately to locate her natural parents who placed her in an orphanage in her birthplace of Innsbruck, Austria while she was still a baby.

Since 1953, Hermie had been writing periodically to the mayor of Innsbruck requesting help in finding out if her natural parents, Alois and Klara Holzer or any of the couple's six other children, were still alive and living in the old community.

Finally on May 11, the mayor mailed his first reply to her many letters. This one correspondence contained the information Hermie had waited so long to hear.

There living in the community she barely remembered, but which was her first home, is her mother Klara now 87. Unfortunately, Hermie has learned her mother is confined to a nursing home and is not coherent, barely aware of her surroundings.

The letter also explained her father died in 1964, she lost her only brother during World War II and a sister, who married an American soldier and reportedly had lived in Utah for a time, had not been heard from since 1964.

However, Hermie does have four living sisters, three of whom still live in Innsbruck and another in France.

As she read the letter containing the names and addresses of her only living relatives, Hermie's tears dotted the stationery.

"I was so excited, I just cried," she said.

Immediately, she began writing her sisters and mother. So far, Hermie has received letters, pictures and phone calls from only one sister, Gertrude Plattner, who lives in France with her husband. She has also learned she has at least two nieces and nephews.

While her reunion with at least one family member by mail and phone has been one of the most joyous occasions in her life, Hermie is still haunted by the question, why she, the third born of the Holzer's seven children, was sent away to an orphanage.

"To this day, I don't know why I went to the orphanage and none of the others did," Hermie said.

"I was told by my adopted parents that I was given up by my parents because I was born during a depression and they could not afford to feed me," she said.

Joseph and Marie Totschnig, who were childless, adopted Hermie in 1925 at the age of five months and moved her to their farm in south Austria.

There, the youngster worked from sunrise to sunset milking cows and doing other farming chores.

"I had a rough life growing up and I worked hard but I was brought up good and very straight," she said.

Hermie lived on the farm until after Mr. Totschnig's death in 1941 and her adopted mother's death in 1942.

At age 18, she set out on her own, landing

her first job as a housekeeper and nanny for an English family.

Her secondary education, or high school, was two years of training in caring for a house and family which proved valuable to her.

In 1953, she moved to England to work for a magistrate and his family. There she wrote her first letter to Innsbruck inquiring about her natural family, but heard nothing from city officials.

In 1957, the magistrate's family decided to move from their 22-room house to a smaller home, leaving Hermie without a job.

So with her life savings, she moved to Canada and took a job with Borden's Dairy Co. There she met future husband George Paul Jones, a native of Lovelady, Texas.

After a year of courting by mail, the two were married in October 1959. Shortly after her marriage, she tried once again to locate her family but failed. After this unsuccessful try, the couple moved to Houston, which they have made their home for the last 20 years.

About a year ago, one of Hermie's co-workers at Kresge where she has worked for the past 18 years, urged her to resume her search for her natural parents and siblings.

Hermie, whose English is still intertwined with a bit of an accent from her native German language, admits she and her sister have some difficulty talking on the phone because Mrs. Plattner still speaks primarily German, much of which Hermie has forgotten after more than 20 years in the United States.

"I have forgotten my own language," she said. "I can understand her, but it's very difficult to answer back."

The two tentatively are planning a Christmas reunion or summer reunion.

Although she longs to see her sister and be close to a family from which she was estranged for almost 57 years, she doesn't really want to return to Austria.

"I'm very thankful for all I've accomplished in the United States," she said. More important Hermie added, "I like it here."

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What Do You Think?

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Return to: Virginia Burns, Editor